

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OVERVIEW

The Peshtigo River State Forest is located in northeastern Wisconsin in Marinette and Oconto counties. For outdoor enthusiasts, the Peshtigo River State Forest is a gem in the region, providing ample recreation opportunities, mature forestlands, and access to two of the largest flowages in the area as well as high-quality stretches of the Peshtigo River. Though the Peshtigo River State Forest is relatively new to the state system — it was established in 2001 — the traditional uses that have taken place there for decades provide a major destination to regional users and will continue to do so. The Forest provides abundant recreation opportunities that aim to strike a balance between the many types of public ownership in the region and the services in the immediate vicinity. The Forest also provides a wide range of forest products that support local and regional economies, as well as provide high-quality wildlife habitat and water quality. Users from across the state and region will be able to enjoy the Forest's amenities for generations to come.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN COMPONENTS

### Land Management Areas

The Peshtigo River State Forest has been divided into eight land management areas: three Forest Production Management Areas and five Native Community Management Areas. In addition to these land management areas, there is also a Shoreland Management Overlay Zone.

- Each management area describes a unique landscape or management focus that considers soils, topography, community type, and other factors which shape the management for each area.
- Each management area has specific short and long-term objectives that articulate the future desired condition based on the ecological capabilities of the area and other factors. Because forests and landscapes change slowly, actions taken (or not taken) over the next 15 years may require 50-100 years to affect the forest as a whole.

### Forest Production Management Areas

Area 1: Peshtigo River Flowages.....	5,324 acres
Area 2: Fly Fishing Area.....	1,825 acres
Area 3: Potato Rapids Flowage .....	771 acres

The general management objective for Forest Production Management Areas is the sustainable production of forest products. However, forest production areas meet a wide range of ecological and recreation objectives. In these cases, management practices are modified to be compatible with and support these multiple objectives.

### Native Community Management Areas

*Area 4: Lake Lackawanna and Cedars.....	358 acres
Area 5: Caldron Falls.....	223 acres
Area 6: High Falls North.....	101 acres
*Area 7: Johnson Falls .....	206 acres
*Area 8: Kirby Lake Hardwoods .....	158 acres

\*Designated State Natural Area

The primary management objective for Native Community Management Areas is the representation and perpetuation of native plant communities and other aspects of native biological diversity. Management activities are designed to achieve land management objectives through natural processes whenever possible. Only those areas of highest value for protection or community restoration were selected.

Three State Natural Areas have been designated on the Peshtigo River State Forest; Lake Lackawanna and Cedars, Johnson Falls, and Kirby Lake Hardwoods (637 acres in total).

- State Natural Areas are part of a statewide system of sites identified for the purposes of ecological research, education, and to assure the full range of ecological diversity for future generations.

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- State Natural Areas are unique because they can serve as stand alone properties or they can be designated on other properties, such as State Forests.

### Recreation

The Peshtigo River State Forest Master Plan will maintain nearly all of the existing recreational amenities and opportunities that were available under Wisconsin Public Service Corporation management. It also provides for a number of amenity expansions or additions to help meet growing demand. The primary additions include an equestrian campground, more canoe and water-based campsites, the creation of designated day-use areas, several expanded boat landings, and more hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking trails. In addition, an increased emphasis will be put on self-guided interpretive trails to promote forestry awareness and natural history. These planned additions are all compatible with our property goals.

### Planned Recreation Facilities and Developments

- 15 campsites will be added to the existing 16 at Old Veteran's Lake Campground. The existing sites will be redesigned, as needed, to meet the Department's rustic camping standards.
- One indoor group camp with electricity, water, and sleeping accommodations for up to 16 people is planned for the Seymour Rapids area.
- Nine new primitive water campsites will be built on Johnson Falls, High Falls and Caldron Falls flowages.

- An equestrian campground will be developed at a site west of High Falls Reservoir and east of Parkway Road where there is access to horse trails.
- Two new rustic day-use areas will be developed, and additional parking and amenities will be added at a number of the existing boat landings.
- Three new primitive hiking trails will be developed; one around Caldron Falls, one around High Falls, and one around the Potato Rapids Flowage.
- A new 15 to 20 mile-long mountain bike loop will be developed.
- 25 miles of designated equestrian trails originating from a trailhead near the planned equestrian campground.
- A cross country skiing connector trail will be developed between the Seymour Rapids and Spring Rapids trail systems.
- A new snowmobile trail link between the Boat Landing 2 area and Boat Landing 5 is supported in concept, however the details of its route must be agreed upon prior to implementation.

### All-Terrain Vehicles

The Department supports the development and maintenance of All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) riding opportunities on appropriate trails, particularly trails that contribute to regional trail networks. The use of ATVs on the Peshtigo River State Forest is autho-



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rized on trails designated for ATV use. ATVs are not allowed on lands, trails or roads not designated for their use.

The Department will maintain the 20 miles of existing winter-only ATV riding opportunities on existing snowmobile trails designated for ATV use. The winter ATV trails will open and close as determined by the open/close season for snowmobiles. Winter only designated ATV trails are shown on Map 2.12: Current and Planned Recreation Facilities.

The Department will also maintain the existing mile of spring, summer, fall ATV trails in the southern portion of the forest that connect to the existing regional trail network. The Department will regularly evaluate existing trail conditions and trail design, and improve the trail as needed to comply with the current ATV trail design standards.

The Department will cooperate with federal and local governments, private landowners and other interested parties in a public planning process to evaluate potential future trail connector(s) that support a regional trail network.

ATV trail designations must comply with the Department of Natural Resources ATV siting and design standards.

### **Boundary Expansion**

The Department approved the expansion of the state forest boundary. This allows for land acquisition in this area from willing sellers. This approved expansion area was selected for its ability to provide additional ecological, economic, and social value for the property and the region. The acquisition goal for the PRSF is 56,200 acres. This increase of 47,000 acres is in addition to the current ownership of over 9,200 acres, not including water. The approved boundary expansion surrounds

the existing ownership. If all the land were purchased in the approved acquisition area, the property would be about 56,200 acres in size, not including water.

### **The Environmental Assessment**

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for this Master Plan. The EA assesses the potential impacts of actions recommended in the Master Plan, ranging from land acquisition and facility development to forest management and operation. The Environmental Assessment concludes that the implementation of the Master Plan provides positive recreational, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region and minimal adverse impacts.

### **The Public Involvement Process**

Public involvement has been crucial to the development of this plan. A variety of tools were used to give information on the planning process and solicit public input, including news releases, newspaper articles, mailings, annual reports, and a website. In addition, public open house meetings and listening sessions were held at various stages throughout the planning process. Generally, the public has indicated that they enjoy the diverse recreational opportunities provided by the forest. Camping, hiking, swimming, fishing, boating, and skiing are popular activities currently enjoyed. Many forest users also indicated a desire for additional facilities such as beaches, primitive campsites, horse trails, and increased motorized recreational opportunities. Comments revealed public support for barrens restoration and active vegetation management across the property as a whole. Many citizens support state purchase of lands around Peshtigo River State Forest, a move that would keep the area in the public domain and open to a variety of recreation uses. The issues that generated the most comments were the desire for the forest to provide horse riding and horse camping opportunities, and regional ATV connector trails.



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#### Importance of the Peshtigo River State Forest

The Peshtigo River State Forest helps to provide and sustain ecological, economic and social benefits, and is important for local and statewide economies. In addition to providing habitat for a diverse range of native plant and animal species, the forest is productive and allows for many different types of recreational opportunities.

The property supports a range of forest types and habitats. Quaking aspen, scrub oak, and red pine are common tree species that help to sustain a healthy and diverse wildlife population. The forest also supports over 3,000 acres of the Peshtigo River, flowages, and wetlands—all part of the complex ecosystem that provides habitat to diverse fish, birds, insects, plants, and rare species.

In addition to providing a home for a number of plant and animal species, the Peshtigo River State Forest supports local communities by providing outdoor recreation for local citizens and tourists. This forest-based recreation provides a boost to local economies every year. Users of the forest are attracted by its many waterways, undeveloped shoreline, scenic forests, and many recreational opportunities. Water-based recreation is one of the main reasons people visit the Peshtigo. Fishing, swimming, canoeing, and water skiing are popular activities, as are picnicking and socializing at day-use areas. There are also remote canoe campsites for those looking for an alternative to car campgrounds.

Land-based recreation includes activities in both lightly developed and primitive environments. The Peshtigo supplies a variety of trail-based opportunities including hiking, biking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and other activities. The forest also offers a range of camping opportunities: campers seeking solitude can choose primitive sites with no developed facilities or they can stay in a rustic campground with hand-pumped water and vault toilets. An equestrian campground will also be developed.

The forest provides unique recreational opportunities being located adjacent to existing and planned recreational facilities such as Governor Thompson State Park and Twin Bridges County Park. These recreational facilities provide additional opportunities and complement those offered by the State Forest.

#### Purpose of the Master Plan

The Peshtigo River State Forest Master Plan spells out how the property will be managed, used and developed, how it will look, and the benefits it will provide. It defines the recreational

uses, forestry and other land management practices in addition to other aspects of the property's future use and development.

#### *The Peshtigo River State Forest Master Plan:*

- Provides a vision and framework for the use, development, management and acquisition of the forest well into the future with an emphasis on the next 15 years.
- Identifies and plans areas for future management and use.
- Describes general land management and specific management objectives and prescriptions for each management area.
- Makes recommendations for recreation, forest production, and habitat conservation to meet current and future needs.
- Provides for continuing public involvement during plan implementation.

#### Overview of Planning Process

A master plan defines how a property will be managed, used, and developed; how it will look and what benefits it will provide. There are several major phases in the planning process as well as opportunity for public input and participation throughout the process. The main phases of the planning process are completing the property and regional analysis, establishing the property vision and goals, considering management alternatives, and finally, creating a plan and an environmental analysis.

The public played an important role in establishing the vision and goals for the Forest. This occurred in 2002 and 2003 in conjunction with developing the plan for Governor Thompson State Park. The vision and goals establish the basic focus for the property and master plan. The next major phase for public involvement is review and commenting on the preferred alternative and other alternatives considered. Then, based on the comments received, a plan was developed and that, along with an environmental assessment, was put out for public review before presented to the Natural Resources Board for approval.

#### Plan Content and Organization

The Master Plan is presented here in five chapters. Chapter one provides an overview of the forest, the purpose of the Master Plan, and a planning process overview. Chapter two provides the plan for the use and development of the property. Chapter three provides background information on the region and the property. Chapters four and five provide an analysis of impacts of the plan and an overview of alternatives considered.

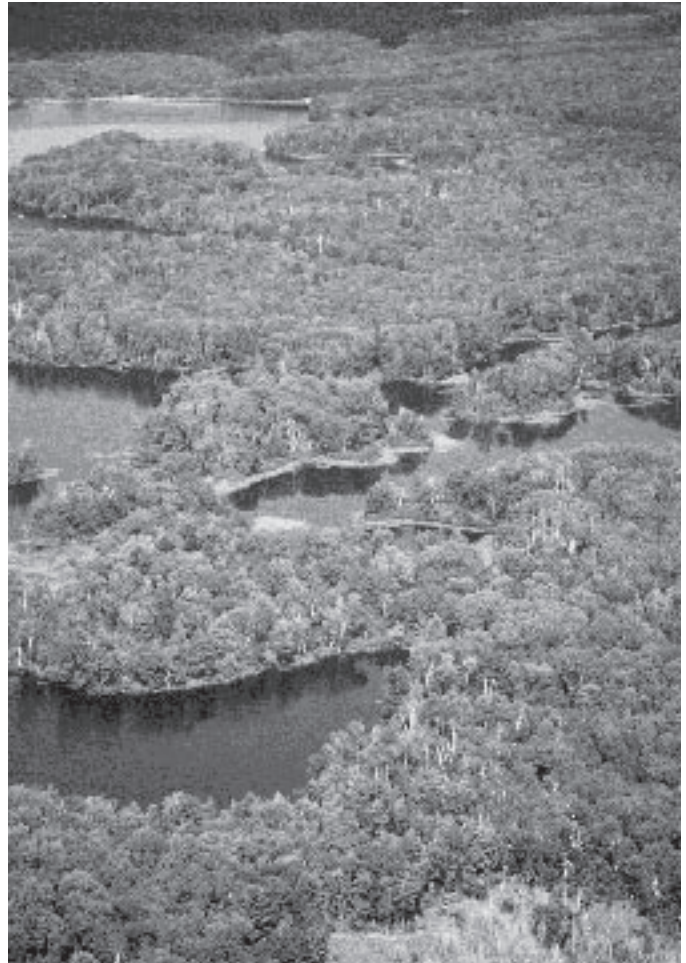
### Purpose of State Forests

State forests are defined by Wisconsin Statutes 28. The purposes and benefits of state forests are outlined in the following language of 28.04 (2):

(a) The Department shall manage the state forests to benefit the present and future generations of residents of this state, recognizing that the state forests contribute to local and statewide economies and to a healthy natural environment. The Department shall assure the practice of sustainable forestry and use it to assure that state forests can provide a full range of benefits for present and future generations. The Department shall also assure that the management of state forests is consistent with the ecological capability of the state forest land and with the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems. These benefits include soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics. The range of benefits provided by the Department in each state forest shall reflect its unique character and position in the regional landscape.

(b) In managing the state forests, the Department shall recognize that not all benefits under par. (a) can or should be provided in every area of a state forest.

(c) In managing the state forests, the Department shall recognize that management may consist of both active and passive techniques.



**This is your plan.** The Peshtigo State Forest master plan addresses people's desires for the future. Wisconsinites want their forest resources sustained for future generations. At the same time, they expect a full range of environmental, social, and ecological benefits today and in the future. This plan attempts to achieve that balance in a scientifically credible and sustainable way. It was developed with countless hours of public input and several rigorous scientific and technical reviews. Many hands were involved in shaping it.

**This is a visionary plan.** The Peshtigo State Forest master plan captures an idealized view of the state forest's long-term future. This points general direction for short-term actions. The diversity of the forest structure is enhanced over time, providing for a broad range of social and ecological values important to Wisconsin citizens, including recreation. Diverse forest communities contribute to the range of fish and wildlife habitats necessary for all native species, and contribute to broad biodiversity.

**This is a focused plan.** The plan calls for active and passive management across the landscape and over time to achieve its goals and objectives. It relies on integrated and adaptive management of the forest resources and focuses on the compatibility of forest uses over time.

**This is a flexible and adaptive plan.** The plan calls for adaptive management and monitoring the response of the forest to strategies outlined in the plan. The responses are evaluated against the objectives. The plan calls for continuous monitoring and regular public reviews and a major review every 15 years.

**This is a sustainable plan.** A sustainable forest requires flexibility and adaptability. This plan will assure sustainable forest products, continued recreation opportunities as well as a sustainable ecosystem and healthy watersheds.

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## HOW THE STATUTORY AND OTHER PURPOSES AND BENEFITS OF THE STATE FOREST WILL BE REALIZED THROUGH THE PLAN

### Local and Statewide Economies

Under the plan, the forest would increase its contribution to the state and local economies through forest products and tourism. Annual harvest levels will increase in the coming years. Providing a wide range of diverse recreational opportunities and settings, maintaining scenic forest resources, and providing wildlife and fisheries habitat will ensure the forest's role as a primary destination in the region.

### A Healthy Natural Environment and the Long-Term Maintenance of Sustainable Forest Communities and Ecosystems

Due to the size of the Peshtigo River State Forest and its varied resources, all of the prescribed benefits of a state forest may be realized on the property. By managing for these benefits, the goals of achieving a healthy natural environment and the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems would be realized.

### Full Range of Benefits

#### *Protection of Soils and Water Quality*

Soils and water quality will continue to be protected by maintaining 97% or more of the land in an undisturbed condition and by following erosion control practices, such as the Best Management Practices for Water Quality (BMPs), when conducting forest and other management activities. Maintaining the forest's undeveloped shorelands is another important way to safeguard the forest's high water quality. Expansion of the forest boundary provides opportunities to expand protection to new areas and waters.

#### *Production of Recurring Forest Products*

Seventy-five percent of the potentially productive lands will be under active sustainable management producing forest products.

#### *Outdoor Recreation*

The plan proposes to maintain all existing recreational opportunities and expand most of them. Rustic camping capacity will increase by 50%, raising the total number of campsites to 31. In addition, an indoor group camp will be provided and 20 horse campground sites will be added. Canoe and other remote-access campsites will increase by nine.

The 20 miles of snowmobile trails on the forest will be maintained, including snowmobile use on designated ATV trails. Other planned recreational amenities include a new mountain bike trail, cross country ski trails, hiking trails, and approximately 25 miles of horse trails.

Access to the Peshtigo River and flowages, and water-based recreational opportunities will be maintained and in some cases, enhanced. An example of the latter is the designation of swimming beaches and an increase in the level of facilities at some boat launches.

Hunting and fishing opportunities will remain abundant.

The development of an integrated State Forest and State Park headquarters located on the Governor Thompson State Park will include an Education and Visitor Center to be shared between the two properties. This will greatly expand the recreational and educational opportunities for visitors and local students.

#### *Native Biological Diversity*

Native biological diversity will be maintained through enhanced forest structure and species composition in some areas. Wetlands and unique habitats will be protected. Endangered and threatened species will continue to be protected.

#### *Aquatic Habitats and Wildlife*

The Peshtigo River and flowages, wetlands, and riparian habitats will receive a high level of protection. All wetlands and riparian areas will be managed to promote healthy ecosystems and aesthetic enjoyment. BMPs for Water Quality will be followed and shorelines will remain undeveloped.

#### *Terrestrial Wildlife*

The forest and wildlife management prescriptions outlined in Chapter 2 of this plan have been developed to ensure that habitat and ecosystems for a wide range of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife will be sustained and improved.

#### *Aesthetics*

Over time, forest health and scenic qualities will be enhanced as longer-lived trees such as white and red pine become more common through forest management. The scenic quality of all shorelines and primary roadways will be maintained and enhanced through the application of aesthetic management techniques.